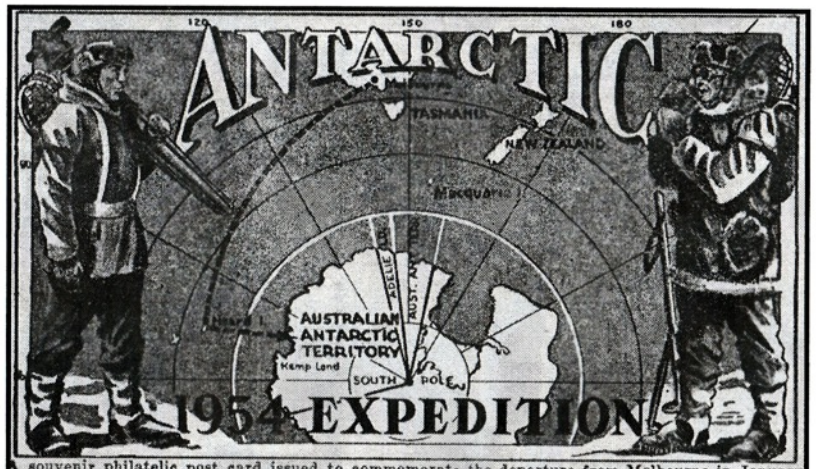
Mawson: The Australian Antarctic Base



A souvenir philatelic post card issued to commemorate the departure from Melbourne in January 1954 of an Australian expedition to establish on the Antarctic continent a permanent scientific station and base for economic exploration of Antarctica.

In 1946, the Australian government agreed to support a proposal by Douglas Mawson the Antarctic explorer for the establishment of a permanent Australian base in Antarctica. It took a further seven years before a suitable ship, the *Kista Dan* could be chartered to set up facilities on the southern continent.

The station site was chosen in 1953 by Dr. Phillip Law, first director of the Australian Antarctic Division who drew on aerial photographs taken during the U.S. Operation Highjump of 1946-1947 to select the site for its large natural harbour (Horseshoe Harbour) and permanently exposed rock for building. The station was built during 1954. Some of the small pre-fabricated huts used in the first years remain on the station, but these are overshadowed by large steel-framed modular buildings dating from a major rebuilding program which started in the late 1970's.

Mawson is a base for scientific research programs including various long-term meteorological and geomagnetic studies, as well as ongoing conservation biology studies, in particular of the nearby Auster rookery, a breeding ground for emperor penguins and Adélie penguins.

Mawson base houses approximately 20 personnel during the winter and up to 60 in the summer. It is the only Antarctic station to use wind generators for over 70% of its power needs, thereby saving over 600,000 litres of diesel fuel per year. It is accessible by sea for only a short period each summer, between February and March.

The souvenir postcard was produced in 1954 to help raise funds for the project, labels were also produced and sold to the public and of course stamp collectors. Stuart Henderson 2019.

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